

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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HEALTH IT PASSES SENATE COMMITTEE

United States Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee reports bill

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, the United States Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee passed The Wired for Health Care Quality Act. Chairman Edward M. Kennedy and Senators Mike Enzi, Hillary Clinton and Orrin Hatch are the bill's sponsors. The Act will modernize health care for the 21st century by setting goal posts for improving health care through technology, reducing administrative costs and diminishing fatal errors caused by lack of information.

The legislation creates a series of funding mechanisms to encourage the adoption of qualified health IT to improve the quality and efficiency of care. The bill also creates a demonstration program to integrate qualified health IT in the clinical education of health professionals and encourage the use of decision support software to reduce medical errors. The bill establishes a public-private partnership, known as the Partnership for Health Care Improvement, to provide recommendations to the Secretary regarding technical aspects of interoperability, standards, implementation specifications, and certification criteria for the exchange of health information.

Chairman Kennedy said, "We have a responsibility to make the miracles of modern medicine available to every American. It's long past time for the nation's health care industry to adopt modern information technology. Such technology has revolutionized a wide array of American industries, and it holds the same promise for the health care industry. It has a clear capacity to increase efficiency and reduce costs at a time when the industry is being plagued by the alarming rise in health costs."

"Doctors, hospitals, health care advocates, and the business community – including small business – are clamoring for Congress to take action and establish uniform health IT standards," Senator Enzi said. "Time is of the essence – if we do not act, our health care system will move forward in a highly inefficient, fragmented and disjointed way. I urge the Senate leadership to bring our consensus legislation to the floor for consideration by the full Senate as soon as possible, so that we can establish an interconnected, nationwide health technology system to improve the quality of care in this country. This bill will eliminate duplicative tests and reduce medical errors. Moving from a paper-based health care system to secure electronic medical records will save lives and reduce skyrocketing health care costs."

"This is an important day for patient safety and health care quality. With this committee's action, we are a step closer to finally realizing the potential of health information technology to lower skyrocketing healthcare costs and improve the quality of care Americans receive by reducing medical errors, wasteful duplication and other inefficiencies in our healthcare system," said Senator Clinton.

"Very soon, we're going to have completely different standards for publicly and privately insured patients," Senator Hatch said. "That will seriously impair how health information technology can improve care in the ways we all want to see. I'm grateful the committee acted

so quickly on this bill."

THE WIRED FOR HEALTH CARE QUALITY ACT

Information technology is transforming all aspects of our modern society, but adoption of IT within health care has progressed slowly. IT systems linked securely and with strong privacy protections to patients' medical records can improve the quality and efficiency of care while producing significant cost savings. Despite the potential benefits of health IT, investment and adoption has been limited, particularly among smaller providers who are most affected by the financial cost of implementing a health IT system. The Wired for Health Care Quality Act would give health care providers the assistance they need to invest in lifesaving health IT.

The legislation encourages the development of standards for health IT through:

- Codifying the role of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology in coordinating the policies of federal agencies regarding health IT.
- Establishing a public-private partnership known as the Partnership for Health Care Improvement to provide recommendations to the Secretary with regard to technical aspects of interoperability, standards, implementation specifications, and certification criteria for the exchange of health information. The National Coordinator will serve as a liaison to the Partnership. The legislation also requires the Secretary to publish a schedule for assessment of standards for significant use cases after consulting with the Partnership.
- Requiring all Federal IT purchases conform to the standards recommended by the Partnership and adopted by the President. Adoption of these standards is voluntary for private entities.
- Establishing the American Health Information Community as a body providing recommendations to the Secretary regarding policies to promote the development of a nationwide interoperable health information technology infrastructure. These include recommendations regarding patient privacy, information security, and appropriate uses of health information.

The legislation assures strong privacy protections for electronic health information by:

- Requiring that the national strategy on health IT includes strong privacy protections, including methods to notify patients if their medical information is wrongfully disclosed.

The legislation encourages the adoption of qualified health IT to improve the quality and efficiency of care by:

- Providing grants for the purchase of health IT systems to providers demonstrating financial need.
- Providing grants to states to establish low interest loan programs to help providers acquire health IT systems that will improve the quality and efficiency of health care.
- Providing grants to facilitate the implementation of regional or local health information plans to improve health care quality and efficiency through the electronic exchange of health information

The legislation will help providers use IT to improve quality by:

- Providing grants to integrate qualified health IT in the clinical education of health professionals and encourage the use of decision support software to reduce medical errors.
- Requiring the Secretary to designate a single organization to develop healthcare performance measures.
- Establishing a Health Information Technology Resource Center where IT users can learn from the previous experience of others who have implemented qualified health IT.